

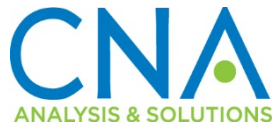
Promising Practices, Challenges, and Sustainability Efforts in the Northeast Tennessee i3 Consortium

Site Visit Report

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July 2015





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Approved by:

July 2015

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stacey Jordan', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Stacey Jordan, Vice President
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Abstract

The Northeast Tennessee College and Career Ready Consortium, funded by a 2010 Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) grant to the Niswonger Foundation, aims to ensure that all its high school students graduate college and career ready. In the spring of 2015, the CNA evaluation team conducted in-person, semi-structured interviews with administrators and guidance counselors at all 30 Consortium high schools. The purpose of the interviews was to understand how schools have overcome impediments to achieving stated goals of the grant, identify promising practices in making progress toward Consortium goals, and learn how schools may be planning for sustainability after the i3 grant ends in September 2015. The results will inform planning for the Niswonger Foundation's new College and Career Readiness Consortium (C³) program, which will maintain some of the original Consortium activities after the i3 funding is gone.

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Executive Summary

In 2010, the Niswonger Foundation received a five-year Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) grant from the U.S. Department of Education to form the Northeast Tennessee College and Career Ready Consortium (the Consortium). The aim of the grant has been to improve the availability and quality of rigorous courses at 30 high schools in northeastern Tennessee in order to ensure that all Consortium high school students graduate college and career ready.

The grant has supported the implementation and expansion of Advanced Placement (AP), online learning, dual enrollment, and distance learning courses. The grant also has provided professional development for teachers to support AP and other rigorous courses, offered funding for necessary equipment and supplies, and increased the schools' guidance capacity by placing dedicated i3 College and Career Ready Counselors at each Consortium high school.

As the end of the i3 grant period approaches, the Niswonger Foundation is developing plans for a new College and Career Readiness Consortium (C³) program, which will sustain some of the original Consortium's activities after grant funding ends in September 2015.

Site visit interviews and analysis

To inform those plans, the Foundation asked CNA, which serves as the third-party evaluator for the i3 grant, to conduct in-person interviews with administrators and counselors at each of the 30 Consortium high schools. CNA developed an interview protocol in consultation with Niswonger staff and conducted the interviews during the spring of 2015. The purpose of the site visits was to understand the following:

- Challenges related to each grant component and how schools addressed them
- Promising practices in increasing students' participation and performance in rigorous courses, improving the quality of instruction in Consortium schools, and enhancing college and career advising services
- Schools' priorities for sustaining grant activities, and any sustainability strategies they have developed

Detailed notes from the interviews were coded and analyzed using an approach that allowed the evaluation team to identify patterns and themes that emerged across the 30 schools. Challenges and promising practices were identified related to each of the grant's components: Advanced Placement (AP) courses, distance learning, dual enrollment, online learning, and college and career counseling. Analysis also identified the schools' priorities for sustaining grant activities after the funding period ends.

Findings

Online learning was the component most frequently identified by schools as a sustainability priority, followed by AP courses, dual enrollment, and professional development for teachers.

Not surprisingly, the most significant obstacle to sustaining these activities begun in the Consortium will be the loss of funding from the i3 grant. While respondents generally reported that district leadership supported their school's participation in the Niswonger Foundation C³ program, few schools have developed sustainability strategies of their own as of this report.

Challenges identified by respondents that cut across all Consortium schools and grant activities were these:

- Need for resources to sustain Consortium activities after the grant ends
- Maintaining communication and strong working relationships
- Classroom space and scheduling capacity

Promising practices identified by respondents that cut across all Consortium schools and grant activities were these:

- Providing financial assistance to students to support rigorous course taking
- Offering professional collaboration across schools and districts
- Strengthening technology infrastructure
- Providing counseling and support to increase buy-in from families and students

Overall, the feedback from Consortium school administrators and counselors about grant implementation was overwhelmingly positive.

The implementation lessons learned as detailed in this report will be useful to Niswonger Foundation staff as they continue to plan for the Niswonger C³ program,

which will sustain parts of the grant activities when the i3 funding period ends. The information in this report also may interest school and districts leaders in Tennessee and elsewhere looking to implement similar activities to strengthen students' access to rigorous courses and their college and career readiness, particularly in rural settings.

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Glossary

AP	Advanced Placement
C ³	College and Career Readiness Consortium
CACC	College and Career Ready Counselor
ENA	Education Networks of America
FAFSA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid
GPA	grade point average
i3	Investing in Innovation Fund
NFLC	Niswonger Foundation Learning Center
RTI	response to intervention
SAILS	Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support
SY	school year

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Introduction and Methodology

In 2010, the Niswonger Foundation received a five-year Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) grant from the U.S. Department of Education to formally establish the Northeast Tennessee College and Career Ready Consortium (the Consortium), a partnership of 30 high schools and several local colleges.¹ The Consortium was established to ensure that its high school students graduated “college or career ready” and to improve the likelihood that they would be successful in college. The most pressing impediment to those goals was the lack of capacity within each district to offer challenging, college preparatory courses.

Through the i3 grant, the Consortium has increased students’ access to rigorous courses through a range of capacity-building activities. These include developing an online learning platform, the Niswonger Foundation Learning Center (NFLC) Online; establishing partnerships among schools and between schools and colleges to increase enrollment in distance learning and dual enrollment courses; and providing professional development for teachers such as training and support for Advanced Placement (AP) and other advanced courses. The Consortium also deployed a team of i3 College and Career Ready Counselors who are onsite at each school one to two days per week to provide guidance focused on college and career preparation.

Goals of the grant

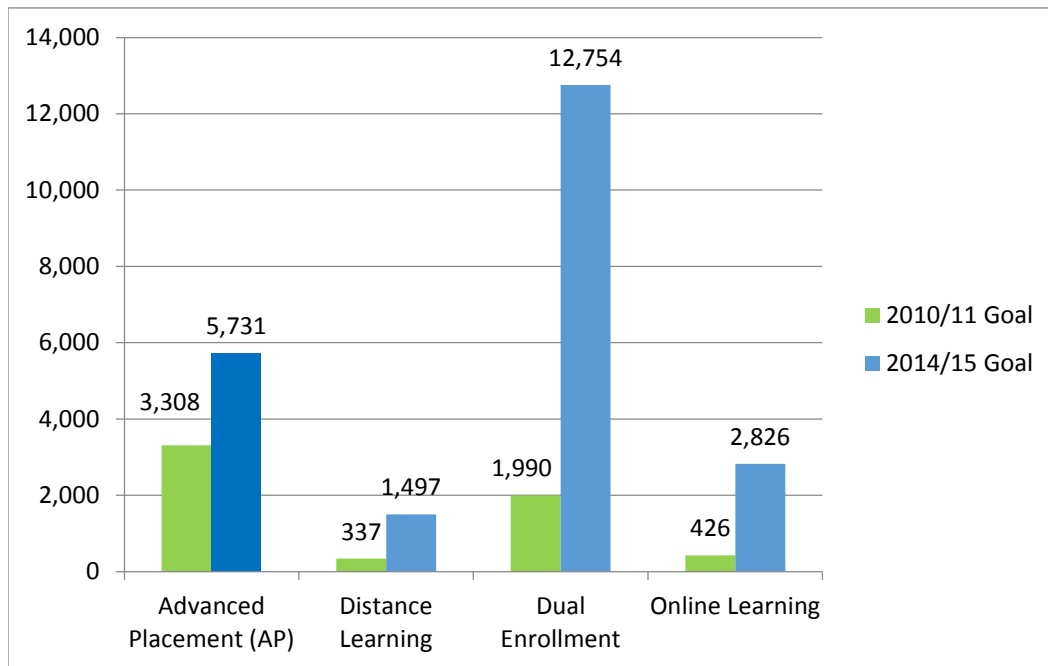
Prior to the implementation of the Consortium, its Advisory Board established enrollment goals for each of the five school years of the grant period. Figure 1 displays the enrollment goals for the baseline school year (SY), 2010/11, and the last year of the grant, SY 2014/15, by type of course. These goals were very ambitious.

¹ The Consortium began with just 29 high schools, but added another (University School) in school year 2013/14. In previous evaluation reports that analyzed enrollment data, data from only the 29 schools present at baseline have been included for that reason; for this qualitative report, however, CNA interviewed and includes here the responses of all 30 Consortium schools.

For example, the enrollment goals for dual enrollment increased more than six-fold over the five years of the grant.

Schools faced a variety of challenges in making progress toward and achieving some of the goals. This report describes many of these implementation challenges.

Figure 1. Consortium Course Enrollment Goals by Course Type (2010/11 vs. 2014/15)



Source: Author calculations.

Research questions and data collection

The Niswonger Foundation is developing a plan to sustain some of the Consortium activities after September 2015, when the i3 grant funding period ends. To inform the plan, CNA, which serves as the third-party program evaluator for the grant, conducted in-depth, in-person interviews with administrators and guidance counselors at all 30 Consortium schools in the spring of 2015.

The purpose of the site visits was to gather qualitative data to address the following research questions:

1. What challenges have Consortium schools faced related to achieving the stated goals of the grant, and how have these impediments changed over time?
2. What promising practices have schools implemented to improve the quality of classroom instruction and advising services and make progress toward the enrollment goals of the grant?
3. Which activities do school staff members consider the most important to sustain after grant funding ends, and what challenges do they face in sustaining these activities?
4. What strategies of their own have schools developed to sustain grant activities, and where have they asked for support from others (e.g., school board, division office, or county commissioner)?

Data collection and analysis

In preparation for the site visits, CNA conducted initial interviews in January and February 2015 with Niswonger Foundation i3 grant staff from the Leadership Team, the Learning Resources Team, and the Counseling Team, focusing on which topics staff would like to learn more about. These discussions informed the development of written protocols for interviews with high school administrators and guidance counselors in each school.

The interview protocols contained sections on impediments, promising practices, and sustainability. The impediments section included questions on the most significant challenges schools faced in implementing grant activities and how these challenges changed over the grant funding period. The promising practices section focused on the areas in which schools had the greatest success in expanding advanced coursework, the extent and nature of schools' partnerships with local colleges, and teachers' reactions to the Consortium's efforts and goals. Finally, the sustainability section asked respondents to identify their priorities for which activities should be continued after grant funding ends and to identify any steps the school or district has taken on its own toward ensuring sustainability of these grant activities.

The protocols guided semi-structured interviews, which CNA staff conducted onsite at Consortium schools throughout March and April of 2015. Each site visit included an interview lead and a note-taker from the evaluation team. Interview respondents from the high schools included at least one administrator (principal and/or vice principal) and one guidance counselor at each high school. At times, others joined

the interview conversations, such as the school's Online Liaison or a teacher who taught AP, online, dual enrollment, or distance learning courses.

To analyze the data, CNA coded the detailed notes from the interviews using an approach that allowed the evaluation team to identify patterns and themes that emerged across the 30 schools. The process was deductive, in that CNA created an initial codebook to identify these themes based on promising practices and impediments documented in earlier Consortium research reports, as well as from the initial interviews with grant staff, then applied the codes to the interview notes as appropriate. Simultaneously, the approach was inductive, because analysis was not limited to the codebook. We concurrently developed new descriptive codes to document new challenges and promising practices that emerged during the interviews.

Organization of the report

Following the themes that emerged from the coding process, the results presented in this report include information on challenges and promising practices pertaining to specific grant components: AP courses, distance learning, dual enrollment, Niswonger-provided online learning, and college and career counseling.

The report then discusses the schools' sustainability priorities and steps some schools have taken toward ensuring sustainability of grant activities. The report concludes by discussing cross-cutting themes that emerged both across schools and across grant activities.

The analysis and ideas in this report are intended to inform planning for the Niswonger Foundation's new College and Career Readiness Consortium (C³). Lessons learned about the challenges and promising practices also may interest other rural schools and districts looking to adopt or expand the types of rigorous courses, professional development, and college and career advising the i3 grant provided.

Advanced Placement

The funding from the i3 grant has been used to support Advanced Placement (AP) programs at the 30 Consortium high schools. AP courses also may be offered through distance or online learning in addition to traditional face-to-face instruction.

The i3 grant has made it possible for Consortium schools to establish or expand AP programs by providing professional development for teachers and mini-grants to fund the supplies and resources necessary to teach AP courses, such as laboratory equipment for science classes. In addition, low-income students have received AP exam fee scholarships to reduce the financial burden of taking the AP exams associated with these courses.²

In terms of professional development, i3 grant funding has provided Consortium teachers the opportunity to attend summer training offered by the College Board, the nonprofit organization that administers the AP program nationwide. The College Board's AP teacher trainings are called AP Summer Institutes. The College Board strongly recommends teachers complete an AP Summer Institute prior to teaching AP courses. They are held at schools and universities nationwide. The Summer Institutes are subject specific, providing teachers with the training necessary to implement teaching strategies specific to AP and for courses taken by students leading up to AP. The Institutes also provide teachers the opportunity to network with colleagues from other districts and to exchange ideas and information on AP courses and exams.

Overall, the AP Summer Institutes are designed to help teachers become more effective instructors and to engage students. During the site visit interviews, several administrators at Consortium schools said that the instructional learning curve was steeper for AP teachers who had not attended Summer Institutes.

AP teachers were not the only ones to benefit from AP professional development training. The i3 grant made it possible for even those teachers who did not teach

² While students may take an AP course without taking its associated AP exam, they typically are not eligible to receive college credit unless they take the exam and receive a score of at least 3 ("passing") on the 5-point scale. Whether and how much credit an applying student is awarded depends on the college.

advanced courses to attend AP Summer Institutes. As described in the **Advanced Placement Promising Practices** section below, benefits to teachers' instructional practice and school culture extended beyond AP classrooms.

Another form of professional development provided through the i3 grant consisted of a series of summer "AP Academies" for current teachers of AP courses. These academies were organized by members of the Consortium's Learning Resources Team with input from teachers in the Consortium schools. They were offered in a variety of subject areas and ranged in duration from one to five days. For example, an AP Chemistry Academy gave teachers practice in implementing inquiry-based labs used in those courses. An AP English Academy brought together Consortium teachers who had the highest AP English exam pass rates to share strategies for helping students to pass the AP exam. These professional development opportunities were designed to improve the quality of instruction in existing AP courses.

At schools across the Consortium, there is a perception that AP programs have contributed to developing a college-going culture and to improving students' postsecondary success. For example, Cocke County High School has been able to offer more AP courses due to the AP Summer Institutes and now is recognized by the College Board as a school that has had significant gains in its program amongst Tennessee schools. An interviewee at David Crockett High School said, "AP courses have increased our competitiveness; it helps our students compete for scholarships."

According to some administrators interviewed, increased AP enrollment has contributed to stronger academic outcomes and college readiness indicators. Interview participants in at least two Consortium high schools said they believe the grant's focus on AP courses has contributed to higher ACT scores.

Advanced Placement challenges

This section describes the following impediments to effective AP program implementation that arose during site visit interviews:

- Student reluctance to take AP courses due to the academic demands of the courses
- Decreased AP enrollment due to greater availability of dual enrollment courses
- Insufficient supply of qualified teachers for AP courses
- Large numbers of students in non-AP courses (higher student-teacher ratios)
- Student socioeconomic challenges

- Insufficient funding for books and materials in AP courses

Student reluctance to take AP courses due to academic demands

Throughout the i3 grant period, some students have been reluctant to enroll in AP classes because they felt underprepared or were worried that they would receive low grades that would negatively affect their grade point averages (GPAs). Respondents also said that students were concerned about balancing AP and other advanced courses with participating in athletics or other activities outside of school, such as having a part-time job.

Decreased AP enrollment due to greater availability of dual enrollment courses

A number of counselors and administrators said they considered dual enrollment to be in competition with AP courses. They offered multiple reasons why students preferred dual enrollment. Most notably, students do not need to pass a high-stakes exam to receive college credit; therefore, students perceived a guaranteed return on their investment in a dual enrollment course. Additionally, some students believed dual enrollment courses were easier than AP courses. Finally, some students preferred to attend classes on college campuses, as opposed to at their high schools.

Administrators and counselors at some high schools did not anticipate future increases in AP enrollment, due to their perception that students preferred dual enrollment. Some schools experienced challenges in sustaining both AP and dual enrollment programs because dual enrollment was more popular.

Insufficient supply of qualified teachers for AP courses

That their supply of AP-trained teachers was insufficient to meet the student demand for coursework was a challenge for some schools. One school would like to offer more AP classes, specifically AP Economics for seniors, but lacks a certified AP teacher in this subject area. Juniors there take AP U.S. History, but the school has no grade 12 AP social studies course. Administrators expressed concern that students would be less prepared for college without an AP class during their final year.

At other schools, underqualified or poorly prepared teachers, who have not had the opportunity to attend AP Summer Institutes, are teaching AP courses. For example, at

one school, an AP teacher admitted not following the curriculum because he did not understand it. Underqualified teachers decrease the quality and rigor of AP courses.

Larger class sizes in non-AP courses

At many Consortium schools, offering additional AP classes increased the class size of non-AP courses due to limited staff capacity. Some schools struggled to implement AP because the program removed teachers from general education classes and dedicated them to a relatively small number of advanced students. For example, one school offered AP courses for the first time in SY 2014/15, but interview respondents there considered student-teacher ratios in general education courses to be too high as a result.

Student socioeconomic challenges

Low-income students at a number of Consortium high schools have had difficulty paying AP exam fees. This was particularly problematic for students taking multiple AP courses, as the exam fees quickly add up. Students at Cherokee and other high schools have relied on grants from the Niswonger Foundation, the College Board, and the state of Tennessee to cover or reduce exam fees. Some families, however, have perceived the grants as “handouts” and were reluctant to accept them. Other schools have experienced challenges with ensuring that students and their families were aware of the financial assistance, particularly in the early years of the grant.

Insufficient funding for books and materials in AP courses

Despite the availability of mini-grants, some schools have experienced ongoing challenges with inadequate funding for books and materials for AP courses. In some cases, this was due to difficulties with organizing administrative processes to acquire needed resources. Respondents from one high school noted that it was difficult to establish an internal process for applying for funds for books and materials from the Niswonger Foundation. But once in place, the process was reactionary—based on what teachers determined they needed throughout the school year—rather than well-planned and based on anticipated need. They identified this as a problem with their internal processes, rather than with grant procedures.

Advanced Placement promising practices

Many site visit interviews included in-depth descriptions of how the i3 grant has directly contributed to the development or expansion of schools' AP course offerings. For example, one school had not offered an AP class for 10 to 15 years prior to grant implementation. As a result of the AP Summer Institutes, AP Academies, and mini-grants for equipment and supplies, Cherokee High School now is able to offer AP Human Geography, Chemistry, and Calculus. Next year, the school will offer AP Physics and Government. According to the counselor interviewed, the growth of the AP program and the AP course taking that has developed among students are the biggest positive changes that Cherokee has experienced since the beginning of the i3 grant. In addition to offering in-person courses, other schools have expanded AP offerings through online learning and dual enrollment.

The supplies and equipment funded by the i3 grant also were extremely valuable to schools' abilities to expand AP offerings. One interview respondent stated that if there were no Niswonger Foundation funds to support AP programs, "we would need to rob Peter to pay Paul." Throughout the Consortium, there has been a need for Niswonger dollars to pay for training and supplies. Without it, many of the high schools in the Consortium would not have been able to provide AP classes at all or would not have been able to expand their existing AP course offerings.

This section describes Consortium schools' best practices related to the Consortium goal of increasing participation in Advanced Placement:

- Providing AP professional development for all teachers, even those not teaching AP currently
- Offering AP courses through alternative delivery methods
- Offering guidance to increase family and student engagement in AP

AP professional development for all teachers

Throughout the Consortium, schools were able to make available AP Summer Institutes and other AP professional development to teachers beyond those who were currently teaching AP. The College Board designs its Summer Institutes to strengthen any teacher's ability to improve students' college and career readiness. Interview respondents reported a general perception that AP training ultimately strengthens all teachers' instructional practice, increases the level of challenge in non-AP courses, and contributes to the development of a culture of rigor throughout the school.

A non-AP teacher at one high school explained the positive influence of AP training on his practice: “AP training opens up the window for what I can do in general education classes, too. It leaks down. It makes me a better professional, as I can offer more and challenge kids more. With more challenge, they usually respond. I don’t teach to the middle.”

Respondents from several other high schools commented on how AP training strengthens all teachers’ knowledge and skills. For example, respondents at Morristown West High School said that attending AP professional development has raised teachers’ expectations for the quality of students’ work.

Offering AP professional development to all teachers also increases a faculty’s overall capacity to teach AP courses. In some Consortium cases, training all teachers ultimately has contributed to the expansion of AP offerings. Over time, Dobyns-Bennett High School was able to offer every AP class available from the College Board but one, and to administer more than 700 AP exams, because additional teachers were qualified to teach the courses. Offering the training to non-AP teachers also has ensured that teachers were available to teach AP classes in the event of teacher turnover.

Offering AP through alternate delivery methods

Schools with limited staff capacity or student demand may offer AP through avenues other than adding their own face-to-face classes. For example, one high school has partnered with a nearby school to allow its students to take AP courses there. Other high schools have offered online AP courses through NFLC Online or Florida Virtual School. However, some administrators and counselors expressed concern about offering some kinds of AP courses online, such as science, noting that AP Biology and Chemistry laboratory exercises were too hands-on and in-depth to be offered virtually.

Guidance to increase family and student engagement in AP

Another promising practice is educating families about the benefits of Advanced Placement, so they can encourage their students to enroll in the courses. Morristown East High School has offered an AP fair for families. The fair includes the opportunity to engage directly with AP teachers to discuss and exchange information about their classes.

Additionally, Consortium schools have increased efforts to engage current and prospective AP students and support their success. To encourage students to participate in AP, high school guidance counselors and Niswonger College and Career Ready Counselors inform all incoming high school students about the potential benefits of AP classes, including teachers' high expectations. The verbal expectation has contributed to the likelihood that more students will enroll in AP classes. To support students, Happy Valley High School has offered an AP U.S. History study session, which took place all day on a Saturday in early May, to help students prepare for the exam. Cherokee High School has designated its second period as a study hall for students enrolled in AP, so they could have additional time to complete assignments and prepare for exams. Allowing students additional time to prepare assignments and study for exams improved their performance, respondents reported.

Distance Learning

For purposes of this report, we define distance learning as a teacher broadcasting his or her classroom instruction in real time, via digital or video technology, to students in another location. The i3 grant funding, as well as in-kind services from participating schools and districts, has allowed the Consortium to afford necessary technology, such as videoconferencing equipment, to support distance learning courses. The Consortium also has been responsible for maintaining a functioning distance learning website. In addition, the Learning Resources Team for the i3 grant has worked with school administrators and other staff to identify and facilitate distance learning partnerships with other schools and external providers in order to expand course enrollments through distance learning.

Distance learning has allowed Consortium schools to offer students a wider range of courses, including foreign language, dual enrollment, Advanced Placement, and Bridge Math.³ An administrator at one school said that “distance learning expands the teacher pool” by allowing schools to offer courses that they would not otherwise have the capacity to offer onsite. Respondents from several schools also mentioned the importance of offering dual enrollment courses via the distance learning format to overcome the barrier of students needing transportation to take a course on a college campus.

This section examines the challenges and promising practices related to implementation of distance learning courses in Consortium schools.

Distance learning challenges

Based on interview responses, schools across the Consortium largely perceive it as difficult to make distance learning work successfully. In the few cases where distance learning has been successfully implemented, it typically was between schools in the

³ Bridge Math is a dual enrollment course that allows high school students to take remedial college math while still in school.

same district. The following section details these challenges Consortium schools have experienced:

- Difficulty coordinating scheduling
- Lack of availability of proctors
- Student disengagement in schools receiving courses
- Misalignment of supply and demand between sending and receiving schools
- Communication between sending and receiving schools

Difficulty coordinating scheduling

By far the most common distance learning challenge has been coordinating scheduling among participating Consortium schools. For a distance learning class to take place, the sending and receiving schools must start and end their class periods at the same time. This has been challenging for many of the schools that implemented distance learning because the bell schedules of schools in different systems generally did not align. A respondent from one school said, “Within district, most of those obstacles have been worked out. The difficulty is when you cross district lines.”

Weather delays and cancellations also have presented scheduling challenges. Weather cancellations at a sending school cause classes to be cancelled, even if classes are still in session at the receiving school. School vacation and extracurricular schedules (e.g., pep rallies) also may not align. These challenges were echoed by the Niswonger Foundation staff in the initial interviews.

Lack of availability of proctors

The second most common challenge to effective distance learning implementation has been the lack of available proctors to monitor students. Receiving schools must provide adult supervision during the distance learning class. In at least one case, the i3 grant provided funding for a proctor position in the receiving school, but that school found it needed support for more than one proctor because it wanted to offer a second distance learning course in a second classroom at the same time. That i3 grant support, however, is ending. Other Consortium schools have used counselors, librarians, or other staff as proctors, pulling them from their regular duties.

Student disengagement in schools receiving courses

Distance learning courses were not necessarily popular with students, as respondents at three schools cited lack of student demand as a challenge. One interviewee said that distance learning was, “not as popular as it once was since we have online and dual enrollment. There is only one student enrolled right now. At one time we had 20-30, or more. Students are not opting in as much.”

Students have tended to prefer other delivery methods over distance learning, if they were available. A respondent at one Consortium school said that students have felt disconnected from teachers in distance courses: “Students’ biggest complaint is that they don’t feel as if they are part of the class. They feel like outsiders and that physical classroom students have more of a connection. Interaction with the teacher is just more difficult.” Further, a respondent at one school mentioned that students initially were intimidated by the technology, and thus, decided not to enroll in distance learning courses.

Misalignment of supply and demand between sending and receiving schools

A number of schools experienced challenges with supply and demand at the school level. Respondents at one school mentioned that they had offered to send a distance learning class to other Consortium schools, but had not received much interest from potential receiving schools. The school ended up offering the courses only onsite. Respondents at another school mentioned that the classes they needed were not available from other schools through distance learning. Similarly, a different school’s respondents mentioned that most of the schools capable of sending courses offered courses in the same subject area, limiting the range of classes available to schools that needed them.

Communication between sending and receiving schools

Some schools have experienced communication challenges between sending and receiving schools. For example, Niswonger staff described how proctors at some receiving schools had failed or were slow to turn in their students’ assignments to teachers at the sending schools. Respondents said that at two Consortium schools, students and proctors reported that the sending teacher had paid more attention to local students than to the remote students. Students at one of these schools

perceived that their grades had been negatively affected by the relative lack of attention.

At a third school, an English distance learning teacher left during the semester, so the school switched to a dual enrollment distance learning course with Walters State Community College. The course was not a good fit, however, because the instructor did not provide timely feedback on homework and assignments. Students were not self-motivated to continue submitting assignments without feedback.

Distance learning promising practices

Most Consortium schools faced such challenges related to distance learning that few promising practices could be identified. However, some schools had made distance learning work. An interviewee at Cloudland High School even said, “There have been no major challenges to offering these courses.” This section describes three promising distance learning practices:

- Effective technology/equipment use
- Strong within-district partnerships
- Additional supports for distance learning teachers and students

Effective technology/equipment use

Generally, Consortium schools reported few distance learning challenges with technology. In some schools, technology originally acquired for distance learning had increased their capacities overall. Respondents at several schools described having used distance learning equipment for purposes other than sending or receiving courses. One school had used the equipment to provide professional development to its teachers. Another had used it to facilitate county-wide professional development and staff meetings. A third school had used the distance learning equipment in a more traditional way—to share a class—but with the specific purpose of allowing a Chinese transfer student to interact with a Chinese language class.

Each school also had received grant funding to conduct virtual field trips with students. For example, faculty at David Crockett High School had used its distance learning equipment to interact with historical interpreters at George Washington’s Mount Vernon estate through a virtual field trip facilitated by the Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration.

Most of the Consortium schools had sent one participant to the Niswonger Foundation's summer 2014 Distance Learning Academy, a one-day workshop offered with the purpose of increasing the school's comfort level with sending and receiving distance learning courses. One of the requirements for attending was agreeing to use the distance learning equipment for a class, teacher learning, a meeting with others not on the school campus, or a virtual field trip during the following school year.

For professional collaboration, Consortium schools have used distance learning equipment and software provided through Education Networks of America (ENA) Connect®, a product purchased through the i3 grant. For example, Carter County uses the distance learning equipment for countywide professional development and meetings. Teachers from all four of its Consortium high schools are able to share information and exchange ideas without traveling long distances.

Strong within-district partnerships

One of the key distance learning challenges noted in the interviews was finding partner schools. Respondents from several schools mentioned successfully establishing such partnerships, or receiving assistance from Consortium staff to establish them. In at least one case, schools had collaborated to send the teacher at the sending school to visit the receiving school and instruct students in person. In another, the i3 grant staff had helped the set of schools establish a distance learning partnership. A school lost its Spanish II teacher prior to the start of SY 2014/15 due to budget cuts. The school staff coordinated with the Niswonger Foundation to receive Spanish II from another Consortium high school. The i3 College and Career Ready Counselor interviewed described the course as "blended," facilitated through the online program Moodle.

The most enduring and successful partnerships have been between schools within the same district.

Additional supports for distance learning teachers and students

Respondents at several Consortium schools reported additional supports for distance learning teachers and students to ensure distance learning succeeded. For example, one school's staff with prior experience with distance learning equipment had provided training to its teachers on effective instructional strategies within a distance learning environment. According to an administrator at the school, the staff "actively troubleshoots" technological issues and teachers' questions as they arise. In

another example, University School is developing a distance learning lab specific to such courses, so that students there have a dedicated classroom space.

Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment programs allow high school students to take classes at a community college and receive both high school and college credit for classes they successfully complete. Dual enrollment classes are not necessarily taught on a college campus; they also can be provided through distance learning (as we define it in this report), online learning, or taught at the high school by a college instructor or high school teacher certified to teach dual enrollment courses.

Members of the Consortium's Learning Resources Team have supported dual enrollment by collaborating with program staff at partner colleges to implement courses in schools. The technology available through the i3 grant (including high-speed Internet, servers, computers, and distance learning equipment) has given schools the opportunity to offer dual enrollment courses through alternate delivery methods. Funding from the grant also has supported other resources for the Consortium courses, such as tuition stipends and books for dual enrollment students with financial need.

The following section describes how students pay for dual enrollment, the challenges of dual enrollment opportunities throughout the Consortium, and the promising practices.

It also includes a description of implementation of the Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support (SAILS) program, even though it is not technically a dual enrollment course. The SAILS program is included in this section because it is a college remedial math course offered as a Bridge Math curriculum for seniors, in partnership with local community colleges. Even though students do not receive college credit for these courses, the SAILS program allows seniors the opportunity to take remedial math while still in high school and enter credit-bearing math classes as college freshmen.

Financial assistance for dual enrollment

How dual enrollment is financed affects the challenges, promising practices, and sustainability of providing dual enrollment to Consortium students. Therefore, it is

important to describe the two main types of grants students in the Consortium had available for dual enrollment support:

- Tennessee Dual Enrollment Grant
- Niswonger Foundation i3 gap fee and textbook grants

Dual enrollment courses typically cost students approximately \$500 each. Many Consortium students have made use of the Tennessee Dual Enrollment Grant, provided through the state via the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation. Through the 2013/14 school year, a student could receive up to \$300 for each of two dual enrollment courses per academic semester, or up to \$1,200 per academic year, if the student met minimum requirements for the HOPE Scholarship [1].

In addition, many Consortium students with demonstrated financial need were able to receive a supplemental Niswonger Foundation i3 grant scholarship, which paid the gap fee, or the difference between what the Tennessee Dual Enrollment Grant covered and the actual cost of the course. The i3 funds also could be used toward course textbooks for such students.

Fall 2015 will mark the beginning of a new statewide initiative, Tennessee Promise, which will provide eligible high school graduates with full funding for up to two years at an in-state community college. This initiative also will change the Tennessee Dual Enrollment Grant program. Beginning in SY 2015/16, the revised grant program will award high school students up to \$500 each for the first two dual enrollment courses, up to \$200 for the third, and no funding for the fourth or more courses. That is, instead of \$1,200 per academic year, students are eligible for only \$1,200 over all four high school years.

This change in the Tennessee Dual Enrollment Grant increases students' financial responsibility after the first two courses, making it challenging for many students to complete four dual enrollment courses without careful planning. In addition, because 2014/15 was the last school year of the i3 grant, funding is no longer available to pay gap fees.

Students who were juniors in SY 2014/15 are grandfathered into the old Dual Enrollment Grant, in that they will be eligible for the \$300 per course for up to four courses their senior year. But they will not have Niswonger Foundation i3 funding to pay the gap fee. Students who were sophomores in SY 2014/15 will be affected by both funding changes.

Dual enrollment challenges

During site visit interviews, counselors and administrators most frequently mentioned the increased cost to students as the greatest challenge to ongoing effective implementation of dual enrollment, although it was not the only challenge schools experienced:

- Concern about rising cost to students
- Potential impact of the implementation of Tennessee Promise
- Student reluctance to take courses due to their perceived rigor
- Scheduling and logistical challenges with partner colleges
- Lack of transportation to college campuses
- Weak relationships with partner colleges
- Low enrollment and challenges with the enrollment process
- Difficulties managing within-school scheduling and staff capacity

The Niswonger Foundation staff mentioned an additional challenge that the schools did not: a relatively late start in the grant in focusing on dual enrollment as a useful way to increase access to rigorous courses for students in the Consortium schools. Funding for the dual enrollment gap fee was minimal in the first two grant years, which constrained enrollment growth in dual enrollment courses at the beginning of the grant period.

Concern about rising cost to students

More than half of the students in the Consortium high schools qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (a poverty indicator), and for them, the costs of course fees and textbooks would be prohibitive without external support. With the ending of the i3 grant and the change in the state grant, these students may find themselves priced out of the dual enrollment program, or at least unable to take full advantage of it.

Potential impact of the implementation of Tennessee Promise

Tennessee Promise is a new statewide initiative that provides two years of community college at no cost to high school graduates who qualify, beginning with the graduating class of 2015. Given the changes to funding support for dual enrollment, many high school administrators and counselors are concerned that students will defer enrollment in college classes until they graduate and are eligible for Tennessee Promise. For example, a respondent at one Consortium school said, “with the Tennessee Promise, the school will need to find a new motivation to have students take dual enrollment courses.”

This potential challenge pertains to both academic and CTE dual enrollment courses. Sullivan Central High School has a welding dual enrollment program in partnership with the local college. An interviewee there said that students “may choose to wait, and just take other classes in high school. It takes longer, but they could end up doing it for free [under Tennessee Promise]. There is forward momentum culturally with welding. Kids want to be part of the program. There’s a concern that it might not take long for that to go away.”

However, the possible disincentive to take dual enrollment classes under Tennessee Promise is not a forgone conclusion, and some respondents said their schools are taking a wait-and-see approach. At Greeneville High School, the Walters State Foundation will provide students with additional support to pay dual enrollment gap fees after the implementation of Tennessee Promise, so staff members there were less concerned about financial restraints.

Respondents from at least one Consortium school mentioned that most of the students taking dual enrollment courses in high school planned to attend four-year colleges or universities. Therefore, because the Tennessee Promise money applies only to community college or technical school, these students had little incentive to put off taking college-level classes. Respondents at another school said they were somewhat concerned about the potential impact of Tennessee Promise, but that enrollment in dual enrollment courses for the summer had increased. They were not yet convinced that enrollment for the coming school year would decline.

Student reluctance to take courses

Respondents at several schools mentioned that students and/or their families were wary of the more rigorous courses, due to the effect a low grade could have on a student’s GPA. At one school, an administrator said that students thought, “the coursework was too rigorous for them, especially because they have not taken online

dual enrollment courses before.” At another school, an interviewee said, “When they realize how tough the courses are, they get a ‘deer in the headlights’ look.”

To encourage enrollment, schools generally have provided students and families with two reasons as to why taking the harder courses was worthwhile for students who were already getting good grades:

- More rigorous courses would better prepare them for the academic demands of college.
- Motivated students who were already receiving good grades typically performed well in the more challenging courses, too.

Students also have differed in the type of rigorous courses they were interested in taking. Some students have preferred dual enrollment courses, because they could earn college credit simply by passing the course, rather than having to score well on a difficult test, as with the AP program. Other students, however, have preferred the perceived greater rigor of the AP courses, and would choose them over dual enrollment classes.

Scheduling and logistical challenges with partner colleges

Collectively, respondents frequently mentioned scheduling and logistical challenges, either at the high school or with partner colleges. Specifically, if dual enrollment courses were provided in the school building, there needed to be a classroom available for those students. Dual enrollment provided through distance learning required a proctor and a room with the necessary technology. For online dual enrollment, students often could view the materials and do the work at home, in the library, or elsewhere, because a proctor was not necessary.

For the most part, classes held at the college have had to be scheduled at the beginning or end of the high school day to enable the students to attend both the dual enrollment courses and the high school courses required for graduation. In some cases, students have been denied access to certain college courses due to scheduling issues. There was at least one mention in the interviews of students not being able to get back to the high school for a one-time event. Another respondent described students not being able to get back for after-school response to intervention (RTI) instruction. An interviewee at one school said, “The more students we had interested, the more [Walters State College] found the need to collaborate [with the high school].”

Lack of transportation to college campuses

A number of schools mentioned transportation as a dual enrollment challenge, because students have had to provide their own transportation to courses held on college campuses. Some students did not have access to vehicles, and those who did had to find money for extra gas to commute to colleges that were far away.

Some schools have addressed the transportation challenge by offering dual enrollment classes on the high school campus, taught by either an instructor from the college or a high school teacher certified to teach dual enrollment courses. Other schools have offered dual enrollment through online or distance learning. In most cases, however, students still have needed to go physically to the college campus to buy their textbooks. In other cases, the i3 College and Career Ready Counselors have gone to the colleges to purchase textbooks to save the dual enrollment students the time and expense.

Weak relationships between Consortium high schools and partner colleges

One of the challenges noted in the initial interviews with Niswonger Foundation staff was developing relationships with the colleges, and then sustaining the relationships in the event of turnover in school leadership. Strong relationships contribute to efficient coordination of scheduling and logistics and greater student interest in dual enrollment courses. At one high school, a representative from a local college used to come to the school to help students register for its dual enrollment courses, but no longer does so. The school has experienced challenges with sustaining such support services from the college.

Poor communication between college faculty and students also can be a barrier to effective implementation of dual enrollment. At one school, students weren't receiving timely communication and feedback from their dual enrollment instructors, and greater cooperation would have allowed a scheduling conflict to be resolved.

Low enrollment and challenges with the enrollment process

A respondent from one school mentioned that the number of students taking dual enrollment courses was lower than expected at the beginning of the grant period because a larger number of students elected to take online courses instead; however, now more students were interested and enrolling in dual enrollment courses.

Administrators at another school said their students tended to prefer face-to-face instruction; since dual enrollment was offered only via online or distance learning, students tended to be less interested.

Respondents at a third school mentioned a challenge coordinating the enrollment process. Students there needed to enroll through their high school to ensure their credits were properly recorded on their transcripts; however, some students tried to register directly through the college.

Difficulties managing within-school scheduling and staff capacity

Schools cited several specific challenges related to within-school scheduling, the availability of appropriate classroom space for dual enrollment, and staff qualifications and capacity. The main two were a lack of lab space for dual enrollment provided through distance learning, and too few teachers at the high school who had the qualifications required by the college to teach dual enrollment courses.

Dual enrollment promising practices

Interview respondents described numerous ways that high schools, colleges, and Niswonger Foundation College and Career Ready Counselors facilitated students' taking of additional dual enrollment courses. Promising dual enrollment practices included these:

- Financial assistance for dual enrollment
- Strong partnerships between Consortium schools and colleges
- Access to courses through alternative delivery methods
- Guidance support to motivate students to enroll

Another potential benefit of dual enrollment is that it has allowed schools to focus on high-achieving students, a group that was perceived to receive less attention at some Consortium high schools. For example, a respondent at one school said, "The biggest thing was that we always catered to the lower group of kids and tried to drag them across the finish line, and neglected the top 20 percent. The i3 grant focused on the upper kids—dual enrollment and Advanced Placement."

Financial assistance for dual enrollment

The i3 grant scholarships covering the dual enrollment gap fee was the most frequently mentioned promising practice to facilitate dual enrollment. Respondents at the majority of schools mentioned it explicitly as an incentive for students to take dual enrollment classes. The i3 grant also has provided funds for dual enrollment textbooks.

Respondents at only one school mentioned the importance of the state Dual Enrollment Grant; but it was implied by most, since the Niswonger Foundation grant covered the gap fee between the state grant and the full cost of a dual enrollment course.

Strong partnerships between Consortium schools and colleges

Most frequently, respondents described how long-term partnerships with colleges have facilitated ongoing effective implementation of dual enrollment. Several other respondents spoke about strengthening relationships with colleges to bolster the number of students participating in dual enrollment. At one school, a respondent said, “Enrollment is beneficial to both secondary and postsecondary institutions. Both sides—high school and community college—want a closer relationship with each other.”

Respondents at a number of schools described receiving additional support from colleges to strengthen their dual enrollment programs. For example, representatives from local colleges have visited high schools to assist students with registration.

At other schools, guidance counselors have established strong relationships with college staff members and have been able to provide them with productive feedback. For example, counselors at David Crockett High School let college staff members know which instructors were most effective with its high school students, influencing the college’s decisions about who would teach its dual enrollment courses. This promising practice also speaks to the depth of the relationship between the high school and that community college.

Colleges also have supported dual enrollment by providing financial support. For example, Johnson County partners with Virginia Highlands Community College, just across the border in Virginia. Although Johnson County High School is located in Tennessee, the college offers the school’s students in-state tuition because it is the closest college to them.

Providing students with access to courses through alternative delivery methods

The ability to provide courses via either online or distance learning has increased access to dual enrollment for students at a number of Consortium high schools. Having the necessary technology for online and distance learning has made that possible; in many cases, the Niswonger Foundation i3 grant has provided that technology.

Respondents at one school said that allowing students to take dual enrollment on the high school campus saved transportation costs. Interviewees at four schools described partnerships with college faculty members to teach courses on the high school campus as a promising practice for increasing access to dual enrollment. At Cocke County High School, college instructors taught dual enrollment courses for high school students during the day as well as outside of school hours for adult learners.

Providing guidance support to motivate students to enroll

Several schools have made special efforts to inform students about dual enrollment options and encourage them to participate. In our initial interviews with Niswonger staff, a respondent commented that Niswonger and school guidance counselors “have done an exceptional job of promoting dual enrollment.”

Three schools mentioned hosting information sessions for students and families on dual enrollment as a promising practice. These schools advertise the benefits of dual enrollment to both students and families early, beginning in grade 8 or 9. At one school, families were eager to have their students take these courses, but students were more reluctant. However, as students have had positive experiences and encouraged their friends to enroll, dual enrollment has become more popular. Respondents at another school said that increased student knowledge about dual enrollment was a direct result of the grant; another said the school’s counselor “sells” dual enrollment courses to students.

Respondents from at least one school framed discussions to motivate students to take dual enrollment around longer-term benefits. An interviewee from the school said, “I feel that the dual enrollment and online classes are a stepping stone to get them. A lot of times our kids lack confidence, but if they take a college class here and they do well in it, it’s easier to go to the next level when you’re not on campus here to go to a college or university. The fear factor is not there anymore”

Hancock High School has recruited current college students who took dual enrollment in high school to return to the school and tell students how beneficial the courses were to their academic success. Dual enrollment courses have helped former Hancock students graduate from college early and earn admission to a prestigious nursing program.

As discussed earlier, in the **Advanced Placement** section of this report, some interview respondents perceived conflict between the goals of the grant—that is, students being more likely to enroll in dual enrollment over AP courses, or vice versa. One school has ensured continued student interest in both types of courses by differentiating the subject matter offered through each type of course. According to a respondent there, the school tries to ensure that “dual enrollment courses do not compete with AP classes.”

Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support (SAILS)

During the site visits, respondents also were asked how their schools have implemented and expanded enrollment in Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support (SAILS)—an online remedial college math course offered statewide to students who are unlikely to be college ready when they graduate. High school students who take the ACT assessment as juniors and score lower than 19 on the math section must take Bridge Math in their senior year. These same students often are required to take remedial math their first year in college.

To better support high school students who may need to take developmental math in college, Chattanooga State Community College created SAILS as an alternative to Bridge Math. The SAILS program blends online learning with individualized instruction. The program has five modules that students complete at their own pace. Students who successfully complete the SAILS course are eligible to enroll in college-level, rather than developmental, math courses once they get to college. SAILS was initially implemented by some high schools on a voluntary basis during the 2013/14 school year.

Across the Consortium, 16 high schools implemented SAILS courses in SY 2013/14, and an additional 6 implemented the program in fall 2014. Of them, 7 schools have received mini-grants from the Niswonger Foundation that assisted with implementing SAILS. Schools had requested the funds for computers—to be used for SAILS courses, and for other online dual enrollment courses when not being used for SAILS.

As described in a March 2015 CNA memorandum entitled “SAILS Use and Participation at Consortium Schools in Fall 2014” [2], most schools have seen substantial increases in completed SAILS competencies and overall completion rates between the first and second year of implementation. Because this memorandum was not released until midway through the site visits, we had the chance to ask only some of the schools why they thought the increase had occurred.

There was no consensus among respondents about why SAILS enrollments had increased. Respondents from two schools simply said they had only fully implemented the program during the 2014/15 school year. At one school, a counselor and administrator provided different, yet not necessarily contradictory, reasons. The administrator said that offering the course first or last period gave students flexibility in their schedules to complete the modules. The counselor suggested that the higher completion rates were due to offering most SAILS sections in the fall semester; that in the previous year, spring semester students did not have adequate time to complete the course due to snow day cancellations.

The range of comments suggests that the reason for the overall improvement in SAILS participation and completion rates for schools participating for at least two years needs to be explored further.

Online Learning

The Learning Resources Team for the i3 grant has handled all aspects of online course development in order to expand course enrollments. They actively have recruited and supervised online teachers for these courses, which includes providing online training to ensure that teachers who have never taught online classes before can properly implement them. In addition, the team has developed, maintained, and evaluated the online courses offered through the grant and assisted school personnel in the use of the required technology.

The grant funding, as well as in-kind services from participating schools and districts, has allowed the Consortium schools to afford necessary technology for the creation of online courses or their delivery, as well as teacher training and stipends. The Consortium also has been responsible for maintaining a student information system that provides up-to-date online course offerings through NFLC Online, the Niswonger Foundation's online learning platform. Additionally, many Consortium students have participated in dual enrollment through online courses provided by partner colleges.

In the onsite interviews, counselors and principals at several Consortium schools praised online courses as vehicles for teaching valuable skills students need in college including self-motivation, time management, and technology literacy. According to a respondent at one school, "These online courses are perceived as rigorous. Students realize they need to be responsible. They are realizing the time management skills required [of college-level courses] and the fact they need to be tech savvy."

A staff member at another high school similarly commented, "The online courses will make them successful and prepared for college work. They will become even more productive citizens now. In a way, that has been phenomenal."

For school administrators and counselors interviewed across the Consortium, one of the largest benefits of online courses is that they allow students to take courses such as Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, and foreign language that would have otherwise been unavailable due to limited capacity onsite at the high school.. Staff at schools with previously limited foreign language options noted that the Niswonger

online courses let students meet the application requirements of competitive colleges for three years of foreign language study.

Other Consortium schools have used online courses to offer additional science classes. For example, North Greene High School had not offered physics due to a low level of student demand. But through online learning, three students took the course last school year, before entering college engineering programs. Staff at North Greene noted the students likely would not have been as successful as undergraduates without the opportunity to take physics in high school.

The Niswonger online courses also have allowed students more flexible and varied scheduling options. Across the Consortium, students have used online courses to fit required courses into their schedules around electives such as band, or to take extra courses while participating in sports and other extracurricular activities. Several high schools also have used online courses to help transfer students satisfy graduation requirements.

This section discusses the challenges and promising practices associated with online course taking in Consortium schools.

Online learning challenges

Based on our interviews with administrators and counselors, Consortium schools experienced the following challenges related to online learning courses:

- Difficulty identifying students prepared to succeed in online courses
- Scheduling and capacity issues
- Challenges with technology implementation and accessibility
- Initial communication issues

Difficulty identifying students prepared to succeed in online courses

Respondents from nearly half of the Consortium schools discussed challenges associated with ensuring that academically qualified and motivated students enrolled in online courses. Administrators and counselors at five high schools described challenges with student engagement, noting the particular difficulty for younger and less motivated students to persist and succeed in online coursework. Online courses

require students to take a more active role in monitoring their own progress in the course, and disengaged students have limited incentives to learn content or complete coursework on schedule. Freshmen and sophomores struggle, according to a respondent at one school “Upperclassmen realize they can contact the teacher if there is a problem. Freshmen are more hesitant and would not make the initial contact to solve the problem.”

Three Consortium schools originally had used NFLC Online courses for students retaking a course they had previously failed, but found the courses were not well-suited for that student population. As one administrator at one high school stated, “For students who are in remediation, Niswonger courses are not the right fit. Students need to be highly motivated, self-managed. Most successful [online] students are not students who are failing other courses and falling behind.”

The format and content of online courses also have been challenging for some students. Respondents at three schools noted that some of the students who signed up for online courses did not anticipate the level of difficulty or effort associated with them. A number of students asked to drop online classes over worries about maintaining their GPAs or keeping up with the workload. Administrators at three others schools said the new format of online courses was intimidating for some students. According to a staff member at one school, students who had never taken an online course found classes without a teacher to provide direct instruction “scary.”

A related issue was students’ technology literacy, which in some cases has been inadequate to successfully navigate online coursework. Staff at two Consortium schools explicitly mentioned that ongoing challenge.

Scheduling and capacity issues

Scheduling and capacity issues have presented another significant challenge for online learning at Consortium schools. Respondents at four schools noted that they struggled with scheduling online courses due to limited numbers of computers or seats in the computer lab, proctor availability, or lacking a specific time built into the school schedule to offer online courses. One respondent described how demand for online courses outpaced supply because the school had only one computer lab: “If we had another computer lab, it would be wonderful.”

Interview participants at another school noted that some of its highest achieving students wanted to take rigorous online courses in subjects that were not available; conversely, a respondent at a third school said there was limited student demand for a couple of the online courses offered.

Respondents at two schools on block schedules noted that they did not have a block set aside during the day for proctoring online courses, which required students to complete assignments independently. Administrators and counselors at several schools noted the importance of proctors for online courses, but some said the end of the i3 grant would mean they would no longer be able to keep their proctor on staff, making online courses more difficult.

Challenges with technology implementation and accessibility

Generally, the computers and other online technology provided through the Consortium has worked well for schools, although interviewees from four schools mentioned technology-related challenges, such as a firewall that initially blocked the NFLC Online site. Of them, respondents at two schools said they were able to resolve technology issues by working either with their district technology director or with a proctor who had a background in troubleshooting technology. Another school reported experiencing ongoing problems with limited bandwidth, which made it difficult for many students to log onto online classes simultaneously.

Accessibility to online resources outside of school has remained an ongoing challenge for students at many Consortium schools. Administrators and counselors at nine schools mentioned that many students did not have computers or the Internet at home, or had only slower, dial-up Internet connections, which made it difficult to access online courses. Staff at one school reported they struggled to find time in the master schedule for such students to complete online assignments there, since they couldn't at home.

Initial communication issues

Staff at two schools described experiencing challenges with communication between online teachers and schools or students, particularly at the beginning of the grant period. Students at one school had not received log-in or course information in a timely manner. Counselors at the other school reported that online teachers had not provided information to the guidance department on students' progress.

One of the teachers at the latter school, who teaches an online class, said that it was incumbent on online instructors to provide counselors with updates on how well students are doing in the course, noting that online teachers are instructed to do so in training provided by the Learning Resources Team. A school counselor also said that guidance counselors initially were unable to remotely add or drop students from online rosters.

All these communication issues, however, subsequently were addressed by i3 grant staff members.

Online learning promising practices

Administrators and counselors also identified several promising practices that improved the implementation of online learning in their schools' classrooms:

- Dedicated online learning staff
- Increased monitoring of students in online courses
- Use of virtual field trips to increase interactivity in online courses

Dedicated online learning staff

As described above, there were some initial challenges in maintaining communication around online courses between the i3 grant staff and participating Consortium schools. Eventually, these were addressed by requiring each school to appoint a dedicated Online Liaison—a staff member who took the lead on school-based implementation of the online learning program, supervised online teachers, and communicated with Niswonger Foundation staff. Establishing the Online Liaison role greatly improved the overall organization of the online learning program and streamlined communication about courses and students' progress among online teachers, the Niswonger Foundation, and Consortium schools.

Respondents at Chuckey Doak High School found the Online Liaison so helpful that the position is a top sustainability priority for it after the grant period ends.

Increased monitoring of students in online courses

To address the challenges of student self-motivation and engagement, guidance counselors, the i3 College and Career Ready Counselors, and Online Liaisons at several schools have screened which students were allowed to participate online, and promoted the courses to qualified students. Respondents at one school described how they “look for a good fit and really enforce the need to do the work.”

In addition, some schools reported that they have closely monitored students' progress once they enrolled in online courses. For example, a counselor at one school described helping students navigate the course interface and become familiar with the technology.

At another school, the school counselor contacted families if students were struggling in online courses. The counselor checked in with online students more frequently in the summer to compensate for the lack of other school-based support for them. Staff members at a third high school noted that when students took online courses facilitated by a teacher in the building it was especially beneficial, because the teachers could make direct contact with struggling students.

Use of virtual field trips to increase interactivity in online courses

School staff at Daniel Boone High School described how online teachers used grant funding provided for virtual field trips to increase students' interaction in online courses. For example, students enrolled in online Health Science participated in a virtual field trip, learning about autopsies from a doctor in Saint Louis, Missouri. They participated in a virtual tour of the lab and asked the doctor questions. The virtual field trip helped students to understand the real-world applicability of the concepts they were learning in class.

College and Career Counseling

The i3 grant has supported a Director of College and Career Counseling and eight College and Career Ready Counselors (CACCs) comprising the Counseling Team. Each CACC has been assigned a set of Consortium schools and has spent at least one day a week in each of them. CACCs have worked closely with each school's guidance counselors to support the schoolwide integration of college and career guidance services. The CACCs have worked directly with Consortium students to inform and advise them about high school, college, and career topics both individually and in groups. They also have set up onsite and virtual college visits for students.

During the site visit interviews, counselors, administrators, and teachers described promising practices as well as challenges associated with providing college and career counseling services, which are described in this section.

College and career counseling challenges

Respondents cited relatively few challenges associated with the college and career counseling services provided under the i3 grant:

- CACC absences due to training or other time conflicts
- Helping families understand financial aid/FAFSA
- Lack of clearly defined roles or tasks for CACCs

CACC absences due to training or other time conflicts

At some of the Consortium schools, respondents were concerned that the CACCs have not been available to provide necessary services due to too much training or a high workload. Administrators at one high school said its CACC frequently was absent due to training, and consequently, could not complete all necessary work. At another high school, the CACC was unable to meet with its seniors one-on-one during the year due to a high caseload. Respondents at yet another school reported they would like the Niswonger counselor to be at the school more than once per week.

Additionally, snow days prevented some CACCs from being at the schools consistently. Some schools suggested that in such circumstances, it would be helpful for CACCs to be available from home, to provide virtual counseling or perform some of their administrative tasks.

Helping families understand financial aid/FAFSA

Another challenge in providing college and career counseling services has been making families more aware of the availability of financial aid and how to apply for it. Respondents at several schools mentioned how confusing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form can be.

Staff members at one high school suggested providing a sample FAFSA form to first-generation college-attending families. Families at the school had tried to search for a sample FAFSA form online but could not find one (since the FAFSA website requires registration and a password). The CACC at the high school believed that if the families could have seen a completed FAFSA form ahead of time, this would have helped them complete the form more easily.

In one district, a school guidance counselor helped a parent complete the FAFSA, but the parent perceived that the family did not receive adequate financial aid as a result. Consequently, school counselors may no longer help with FAFSA forms in that district; instead, its high schools rely on the CACCs and Upward Bound staff members to disseminate FAFSA information to families and support families in completing the form.

Lack of clearly defined roles or tasks for counselors

Some CACCs have experienced an on-the-job challenge because school guidance counselors or other school staff have not understood their role and assigned them either administrative tasks or tasks unrelated to college and career guidance. One CACC initially was assigned to the library because staffing was needed there. Other CACCs initially were assigned basic administrative tasks to support the school's own counseling department. According to one CACC, there is still a guidance counselor at his school who "thinks [the CACC] should be a secretary." However, since the school's counselors have gotten to know him and his expertise, his role interacting with students has expanded.

The counselors interviewed agreed it is important for Consortium schools to understand the role of a CACC before that person comes onboard.

College and career counseling promising practices

CACCs have provided schools with additional staffing, allowing Consortium schools with otherwise overburdened guidance departments to provide more comprehensive and extensive college and career counseling services. CACCs have provided in-depth, one-on-one advising on course registration, Tennessee Promise, college applications, ACT preparation, and participation in dual enrollment and Advanced Placement.

Especially beneficial to the students, CACCs also have strong connections to local and regional colleges and have kept students up-to-date with any changes in application or financial aid requirements. Additionally, CACCs have offered students and their families the opportunity to visit colleges as an organized activity through their high schools.

The promising practices related to CACCs are organized into the following categories:

- Providing personalized advising
- Disseminating information on college and financial aid
- Advising on best practices related to AP and dual enrollment courses
- Collaborating with high school guidance counselors and with other CACCs

Providing personalized advising

CACCs often have developed ongoing, strong relationships with students, which has allowed them to provide personalized advising services. Consortium-wide, teachers confirmed that they have appreciated the CACCs making their job easier, freeing them to focus on teaching content rather than providing students with personal and college and career counseling.

Respondents at one school said that the CACCs were able to support many of the students who did not have strong family support at home. For instance, for the half dozen students at the school who were homeless and stayed with friends, the i3 counselor paid them specific attention, discussing their future careers with them to show them avenues in which they could succeed.

Disseminating information on college and financial aid

The additional counseling capacity provided by the CACCs has made it much easier for Consortium schools to give students and families information and help with financial aid, as well as to provide guidance on applying to college and Tennessee Promise.

CACCs have supported individual students in completing college, need-based financial aid, and scholarship applications. They also have provided supplemental professional development to school guidance counselors on these topics. For example, at one high school, the CACC advised its guidance counselors on how best to help students complete college and FAFSA applications.

The CACCs have hosted family information sessions focusing on college applications and financial aid options, among other topics. According to interview respondents, the CACCs were especially helpful in this way with FAFSA completion. The application is extremely confusing for first-generation college-bound students and their families, so clear instructions from the CACCs made the process much simpler. Separate from the information sessions, the CACCs met one-on-one with families to answer more in-depth questions.

CACCs also have helped students apply for Tennessee Promise, including meeting individually with students and otherwise to discuss the application process. An administrator at one Consortium school said the CACCs held an in-service session over the summer for school counselors focused on the application requirements for Tennessee Promise. At another school, the CACC helped all of the seniors apply for the scholarship; then if students hadn't yet applied and missed the original meeting, the counselor walked them through the process. An interviewee at a third high school said that the CACC alerted students to volunteer opportunities to help them fulfill the community service hours they needed prior to enrolling the next fall.

The CACCs have provided an outside perspective that the students appreciate and respect. As one interviewee stated, "The counselor has become a familiar face to students after having seen her in class. The counselor was also knowledgeable and good at her job. We need someone from the outside giving [the students] a perspective other than the one we would. They are more apt to listen to that person."

Similarly, an interviewee at another school stated that "it is helpful having an outside face encourage students to take the opportunities we have been telling them about for four years."

The CACCs also have organized school-sponsored college visits for the first time, or facilitated more visits than were offered previous to the i3 grant, depending on the school. At one high school, the CACC has helped students arrange personalized visits to colleges. For example, one junior was interested in veterinary science, and the CACC accompanied her and her family on a visit to the University of Tennessee to tour both the campus and the veterinary school. CACCs also have provided opportunities for students to meet with college representatives during lunch.

Advising on best practices regarding AP and dual enrollment courses

The CACCs have shared best practices for offering AP and dual enrollment classes with the Consortium high school counselors. CACCs also have helped students resolve individual scheduling conflicts between dual enrollment and AP classes they would like to take.

CACCs also have helped make students aware of the rigorous courses offered through the Consortium and their benefits. One respondent noted how they held meetings for freshmen on dual enrollment every year so students could begin planning for these courses early in their high school experience. The CACCs also have provided guidance to students on the benefits of taking dual enrollment courses. For students unable to afford dual enrollment courses on their own, CACCs have helped them to complete applications for financial aid from both the state and the i3 grant.

Collaborating with high school guidance counselors and with other CACCs

Interviewees reported a great deal of collaboration between CACCs and the Consortium schools' guidance counselors. One school, for instance, received an extra day of support from a CACC that another school did not need. The extra capacity was extremely helpful for the first school's guidance department. The school's counselors and the CACC facilitated planning meetings with colleges on ACT and a senior preview night to show students their future possibilities after high school.

The CACCs also have collaborated with one another to improve college and career guidance across the Consortium. For example, all of the CACCs have a joint Dropbox® account that allows them to share valuable resources, such as sign-in sheets and registration forms. In addition to virtual collaboration, the CACCs have collaborated in person with other i3 staff at regular staff meeting and with colleagues at events such as Tennessee Counseling Association (TCA) conferences.

Sustainability Practices and Priorities

At each site visit, the CNA team asked participants what activities from the Consortium they would most like to see sustained after the i3 grant ends in September 2015. The top sustainability priorities identified by the 30 Consortium schools were these:

- Online learning courses (N=15 schools)
- Advanced Placement courses (N=14 schools)
- Dual enrollment courses (N=13 schools)
- Staff professional development (N=6 schools)⁴

Respondents at many Consortium schools are worried they will be unable to sustain these four activities at their current levels without funding from the i3 grant. For instance, after the grant period ends, it will be difficult to purchase new books and equipment for Consortium courses. Administrators and counselors at a number of schools are particularly worried about whether students will be able to afford online classes without support from the i3 grant, as students typically had to pay a fee to take these courses before the grant began.

College and career ready counseling was a priority for respondents at 11 schools, but it didn't qualify as a "top priority" for schools' sustainability plans. The reason is that respondents at many of these schools are hoping to receive similar services through the Niswonger CARES initiative, a near-peer advising program that the Foundation is developing to sustain college and career advising at Consortium schools after the i3 grant runs out. Four schools mentioned support for technology infrastructure as a sustainability priority. None of the schools indicated that distance learning was a high sustainability priority.

This section discusses why schools identified online learning, AP, dual enrollment, and professional development as their top priorities, as well as any sustainability

⁴ Some respondents identified more than one top priority, so the total sums to more than 30.

strategies schools or districts have developed and implemented on their own to sustain them.

Online learning

Respondents at 15 of the 30 Consortium schools stated that sustaining online learning courses is priority. Online courses have been particularly helpful to students who would like to graduate from high school early. Respondents at one school said some 20–30 students each class period participate in online courses. The administrators and counselors there did not know how they would add course capacity for these students. For many respondents, the cost of maintaining online courses without the Consortium’s support will be the biggest barrier to sustaining them. Specifically, respondents expressed concern about sustaining funding for proctors and maintenance of technology infrastructure, even if schools have continued access to NFLC Online.

Respondents at several schools described how their staffs are working with the district superintendent to keep online learning (and dual enrollment) courses available. For instance, the administration and counselor at one school met with the superintendent to determine how to offer CTE courses and Spanish online next year. Respondents at another school had found the Online Liaison to be very helpful, and recently appealed to the central office to fund the position using district monies. Unfortunately, they considered this request a “long shot.”

Other schools are working with their central office to finance a plan that will allow them to join Niswonger’s new College and Career Readiness Consortium and continue to take advantage of online courses. Respondents at one school said they anticipate being able to offer only those courses not already offered face-to-face.

Advanced Placement

In the interviews, respondents at 14 of the 30 Consortium high schools stated that they considered the AP program to be one of their sustainability priorities. Many of the interviewees had found that the grant provided increased and sustained access to AP classes.

Ultimately, it was AP training for teachers that really helped increase and sustain the AP program at the Consortium schools. Schools that had not previously offered AP courses now were able to offer them. Mini-grants had allowed faculty members to purchase the supplies and equipment necessary to offer courses such as AP lab

sciences. Online AP courses had particularly increased schools' capacity, since online offerings meant it was not necessary to hire additional teachers in all AP subject areas.

Respondents at several schools shared concerns about being able to provide ongoing professional development to teachers and ensuring that teachers were well qualified to teach AP courses. For example, one school has used grant funds to offer AP professional development to all of its teachers, but plans to cut back in future years to only those teachers who are currently teaching AP. Respondents there were concerned this change might have a negative impact on instructional practice schoolwide. The school also plans to send current AP teachers to AP training less frequently, once every three to four years instead of annually. Likewise, respondents at other schools said they would need to limit the scope of AP training once the i3 grant ends.

Interview respondents also were concerned that enrollment in AP classes might drop, or that fewer students would take AP exams when i3 grant support is no longer available to pay for exam fees. According to a respondent at one school, "For some families, [the exam fee] is a stretch, and they may no longer do it."

Dual enrollment

The i3 grant has made it possible for the Consortium to maintain its dual enrollment partnerships. Respondents at 13 schools said dual enrollment is a sustainability priority. Those at one school noted that the priority is to have colleges remain involved to maintain strong relationships. An interviewee there said, "Everything is a stepping stone; this grant is a stepping stone to see where we can go further. We want to keep the grant activities moving forward."

A part of "moving forward" is continuing the dual enrollment nights or information sessions that CACCs have provided, which have increased student participation in the dual enrollment program.

Participation in dual enrollment has increased at least in part because students were able to receive support for the complete costs of the courses, between the Tennessee Dual Enrollment Grant and the i3 gap fee assistance. Another school mentioned how through the i3 grant funding the school was able to hire a position in its dual enrollment/distance learning lab, which also contributed to the success of its dual enrollment program.

Schools are taking some steps to sustain dual enrollment in their districts. Several respondents mentioned meeting with district leadership around the importance of

dual enrollment and sustaining strong relationships with local colleges. Some schools have reached out to other organizations for gap fee support. Walters State Community College will provide students at Greeneville High School with funds for gap fees previously covered by the Consortium. The college also will provide scholarship dollars to Morristown East High School. Hancock High School is working with local nonprofit agencies to provide students with gap fee assistance, as well as soliciting additional support from the community.

In Johnson County, Virginia Highlands Community College has agreed to provide funding for teachers to become certified to teach dual enrollment courses on the Johnson County High School campus, a cost of \$1,500 per teacher. As of March 2015, seven teachers had requested applications to receive the training.

Professional development

Professional development activities have facilitated valuable connections for teachers and staff members across Consortium schools. Interviewees from six schools consider professional development to be one of their sustainability priorities. School administrators throughout the Consortium are aware that it will take effort to sustain collaborative relationships that have been developed as a result of the professional development provided by the grant.

Several principals mentioned that they had met with Niswonger Foundation staff to alert them to the importance of sustaining professional development and planned to speak to their district's central office about the importance of ongoing professional development. The principals are not certain that professional development is sustainable without continued external support. One school currently has the budget to send one teacher to AP training, but not all the teachers the administration would like to send. As described above, several schools would have to scale back the number and/or frequency of teachers participating in AP professional development. Individual schools also do not have the capability to invite nationally known speakers to do staff development, as the Consortium was able to do for many of its professional development events.

To sustain some of the professional development opportunities provided by the i3 grant, both school and district leadership must be supportive. This is especially true because it is the central office that must approve a school's participation in the Niswonger Foundation's new C³ program, which will require payment of a fee. Interviewees at many schools indicated that their central office was supportive, but had yet to develop a concrete sustainability plan for professional development or

other Consortium activities. One respondent said, “Money is the only difference. Staff are constantly working on their practice, and money is the obstacle.”

Conclusions

The Niswonger Foundation's i3 grant has dramatically increased the capacity of the 30 high schools of the Northeast Tennessee College and Career Ready Consortium to offer rigorous courses, with the aim of improving the college and career readiness of its graduates. This section provides an overview of impediments to implementation and promising practices cutting across all i3 grant activities.

Challenges across Consortium schools and grant activities

Implementation impediments across Consortium schools and grant activities, described in the following subsections, are these:

- Need for resources to sustain Consortium activities after the grant ends
- Maintaining communication and strong working relationships
- Classroom space and scheduling capacity

Need for resources to sustain Consortium activities after the grant ends

Even if Consortium schools are able to continue offering rigorous dual enrollment, online learning, and Advanced Placement after the i3 grant ends, they still will need supplemental funding and resources to sustain the quality of the courses. For example, schools may be able to continue offering online courses through participation in Niswonger's new College and Career Readiness Consortium. However, the schools still will need to keep proctors on staff to supervise those C³ classes and maintain the technology to make sure course delivery functions properly. One administrator wondered, "How will we sustain hardware and online systems; and if we can't do that, what will our school look like? We'll have to make sacrifices and do what we have to do."

Schools also will need to ensure there are enough teachers on staff who are qualified to teach rigorous courses. For example, a respondent at one school said only two AP-trained teachers remain there due to teacher turnover. Even when the College Board's AP Summer Institutes and the Consortium's AP Academies were available, turnover sometimes made it challenging for schools to provide an adequate number of well-trained teachers to meet student demand for AP courses.

In future, districts and schools might consider alternative avenues for experienced AP teachers to share their instructional expertise and experience with others.

Maintaining communication and strong working relationships

Coordinating the implementation of grant activities among 30 high schools throughout a region is challenging. Early in the grant period, there were communication issues the Consortium schools and Niswonger staff worked together to address. For example, the Consortium appointed an Online Liaison at each school to serve as a single point of contact on matters around online learning. The Liaisons ensured effective communication between students and the Consortium and among guidance counselors, online teachers, and Niswonger Foundation staff.

Similarly, many high schools strengthened their relationships with local colleges as a result of expanding dual enrollment. Schools and colleges worked together to offer dual enrollment in a convenient format at a time that worked well for each partner. Now it will take ongoing work on the part of both partners to sustain these relationships.

It is also uncertain whether Consortium administrators, teachers, and counselors will collaborate across schools and districts to the same extent without sharing ongoing professional development opportunities. Sustaining those established relationships will take resources and time that schools may no longer have. Speaking of the importance of sustaining professional development in some capacity, an administrator in one school said, "Sustaining that relationship building is very challenging. Someone has to organize and coordinate it. It will take someone's time." The respondent would like to see teachers continue to establish such collaborative relationships in the future, but is not sure how to do it without grant support.

Classroom space and scheduling capacity

Issues of classroom space and scheduling capacity also led to challenges in meeting the goals of the grant. For example, several schools noted that offering AP and other

advanced courses had decreased the number of teachers available to teach general education courses and increased the size of those courses. Teachers who would have taught larger groups of regular students now had been dedicated to relatively few advanced students.

In some instances, it was difficult for schools to schedule classroom space and time for distance learning or online learning courses. In particular, schools in different districts had faced considerable difficulty coordinating distance learning schedules due to differences in bell schedules and unanticipated interruptions such as snow days. According to one interview respondent, “Within districts, most of those obstacles have been worked out. The difficulty is when you cross district lines.”

Scheduling also challenged the implementation of dual enrollment, which required schools to coordinate logistics with colleges. At times, students were unable to take the dual enrollment course they desired because it was offered either before or after the high school day. Other times, students’ dual enrollment options were limited because they needed to return to their high schools by a certain time to fulfill a required activity.

Promising practices across Consortium schools and grant activities

Promising practices common across Consortium schools and grant activities, briefly summarized in the next subsections, are these:

- Providing financial assistance to students to support rigorous course taking
- Offering professional collaboration across schools and districts
- Strengthening technology infrastructure
- Providing counseling and support to increase buy-in from families and students

Providing financial assistance to students to support rigorous course taking

The i3 grant provided subsidies for students that allowed them to fully participate in rigorous courses at their high schools. Subsidies for AP exam fees allowed more students to take the exams and likely saved them time and money by earning them

college credit. The gap fee scholarships and textbook support for dual enrollment allowed additional students to enroll in these courses or students to take additional dual enrollment courses than they might have otherwise. According to one respondent, “[Students and their families] are grateful for the financial aid for items the previous dual enrollment grants did not cover, such as textbook costs and other course expenses.”

Another said parents are more likely to encourage their students to enroll once they know financial subsidies are available.

Offering professional collaboration across schools and districts

Staff interviewed at almost all of the Consortium high schools noted that the opportunity to participate in the i3-funded AP Summer Institutes and annual symposia were extremely valuable because they provided the opportunity to interact with their peers in other districts and schools. Through collaboration, teachers and administrators shared strong practices that benefited their instructional approach and, it is hoped, the success of students throughout the region. A former administrator at one school said the opportunity to collaborate with peers in other districts led to relationships that would long outlast the grant itself: “It opened doors and made contacts for us as a Consortium that we would have not had otherwise.”

A respondent at another school described the benefits of collaborating with other districts: “Inter-district collaboration has been helpful in creating a community where people can bounce ideas off of one another. I have made more friends who I feel comfortable bouncing ideas off of.”

The same respondent noted that the Consortium connected her with peers at other schools who were experiencing similar challenges to implementing i3 grant activities so they could learn from one another.

Another benefit that i3 professional development provided to teachers, administrators, and counselors was the opportunity to gain perspective on statewide and national instructional issues. For example, the grant paid for most of the Consortium school principals to attend an annual conference of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, for which funding would not otherwise have been available. Through the conference, the principals gained perspective on national policy and initiatives and how they might affect their schools.

Strengthening technology infrastructure

Interview respondents at 9 of the 30 schools explicitly discussed how the technology and equipment provided through the grant not only contributed to the grant goal of expanding rigorous courses, but also expanded their capacity more generally. According to a respondent at one school, “People are amazed at how far Eastern Tennessee is ahead of the rest of the state in technology application due to the i3 grant.” Respondents at two additional schools said that increased access to technology improved teachers’ skill levels and helped them be more creative when using technology in their lessons. At a third school, science teachers began using technology for a new activity, virtual dissections, providing students with a whole new kind of scientific information.

Throughout the Consortium, schools used distance learning equipment for other purposes, in addition to student instruction, such as districtwide professional development or staff meetings. Respondents at one school noted that it is beginning to educate the wider community about instructional technology; for example, the school held a family night focused on the new technological resources available to their students.

Providing counseling and support to increase buy-in from families and students

Across the Consortium, high school faculty and staff, as well as the CACCs, made an effort to offer counseling and support that increased buy-in from families and students and encouraged students to enroll in challenging courses and consider a range of postsecondary options. At some schools, students and their families were reluctant to sign up for rigorous courses because they were concerned that students would struggle, which would negatively affect their GPAs. CACCs and counselors at these schools advised students that rigorous courses would provide better preparation for college and that motivated students who had done well in previous courses tended to perform well in these challenging courses, as well.

One school described how it holds a fair to inform families about the benefits of AP classes and give them an opportunity to ask questions of its AP teachers. Similarly, at least three schools hold dual enrollment information sessions for families and students to inform them of the potential benefits of participation.

Respondents at another school described how families had been receptive to dual enrollment once they learned about the academic benefits these courses provide. One interviewee said, “Bringing parents in and telling them that we could offer college courses to high school students is an easy sell—now students have two transcripts.

Students are earning from 3 to 24 college credit hours before they graduate, something we could have never done before the grant.”

Summary

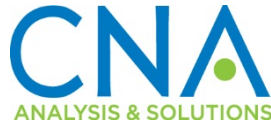
Overall, the feedback about grant implementation that school administrators and counselors provided during these spring 2015 interviews was overwhelmingly positive. For example, one principal commented that the grant activities were “a shot in the arm to schools all over Northeastern Tennessee. It has given us opportunities we would have not had before.” Another interview respondent said that the grant had helped his school “raise the bar, giving us things that we’ve needed without affecting what’s already working.”

The site visit interviews identified promising practices and challenges related to the implementation of each grant component. While the majority of promising practices and challenges are unique to a specific grant component, there were several that were common to all grant activities across Consortium schools. The information included in this report will be valuable for Niswonger Foundation staff as they continue to plan for sustaining grant activities through the new College and Career Readiness Consortium (C³).

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This report was written by CNA Corporation's Education (EDU) division.

EDU uses applied research, experimental trials, program evaluations, and technical assistance in assessing a broad range of education issues and their real-world implications. EDU operates the Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia, funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, which provides technical assistance and research support to educators and policy-makers in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.





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